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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FRENCH DENY ANY PLANS TO SELL FIGHTER AIRCRAFT TO CHINA

REF: 4/12 FBIS REPORTS FROM TAIWAN NEWS AND HONG KONG

HSIANG KANG SHANG PAO

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, Reason 1  
.4 B/D

1. (U) Reftel FBIS reports quoted Taiwan and Hong Kong press reports that France intends to sell 210 Mirage 200-9CS fighter aircraft, along with 1,200 MICA missiles and 180 alternative engines, as part of a 12 billion euros defense trade package. The sale allegedly was agreed to last December 2004. The same report quotes unnamed French military sources as saying that 40 Chinese pilots are scheduled to receive training in France, as of June 2005. Additionally, the French defense firm Dassault, which manufactures the Mirage planes, is to sell 20 Atlantic ALF-3 maritime patrol aircraft, according to the FBIS reports.

2. (C) We contacted MFA and MOD officials who emphatically assured us that there was no truth to the press stories. Marc Abensour, MFA DAS-level director for Asia, including China, expressed surprise that we would even seek to verify such "unfounded rumors." Abensour and Arnaud Barthelemy, special assistant to Political Director Stanislas de Laboulaye, reminded us that the EU Council last December had agreed that the EU would not take any action to change China's qualitative or quantitative capacities. On April 14, Camille Grand, technical advisor to the Minister of Defense, also denied the allegations, adding that he had spoken to Dassault Aviation, which said that it did not have contacts with the Chinese on this issue.

3. (U) Interestingly, on April 13, EADS co-chairman Hertrich was quoted in the French daily Le Figaro and in AFP as saying that the company would not sell arms to China, even if the EU were to lift its embargo on China, as EADS does not wish to jeopardize its commercial interests with the United States.  
LEACH